

COPING DURING COVID

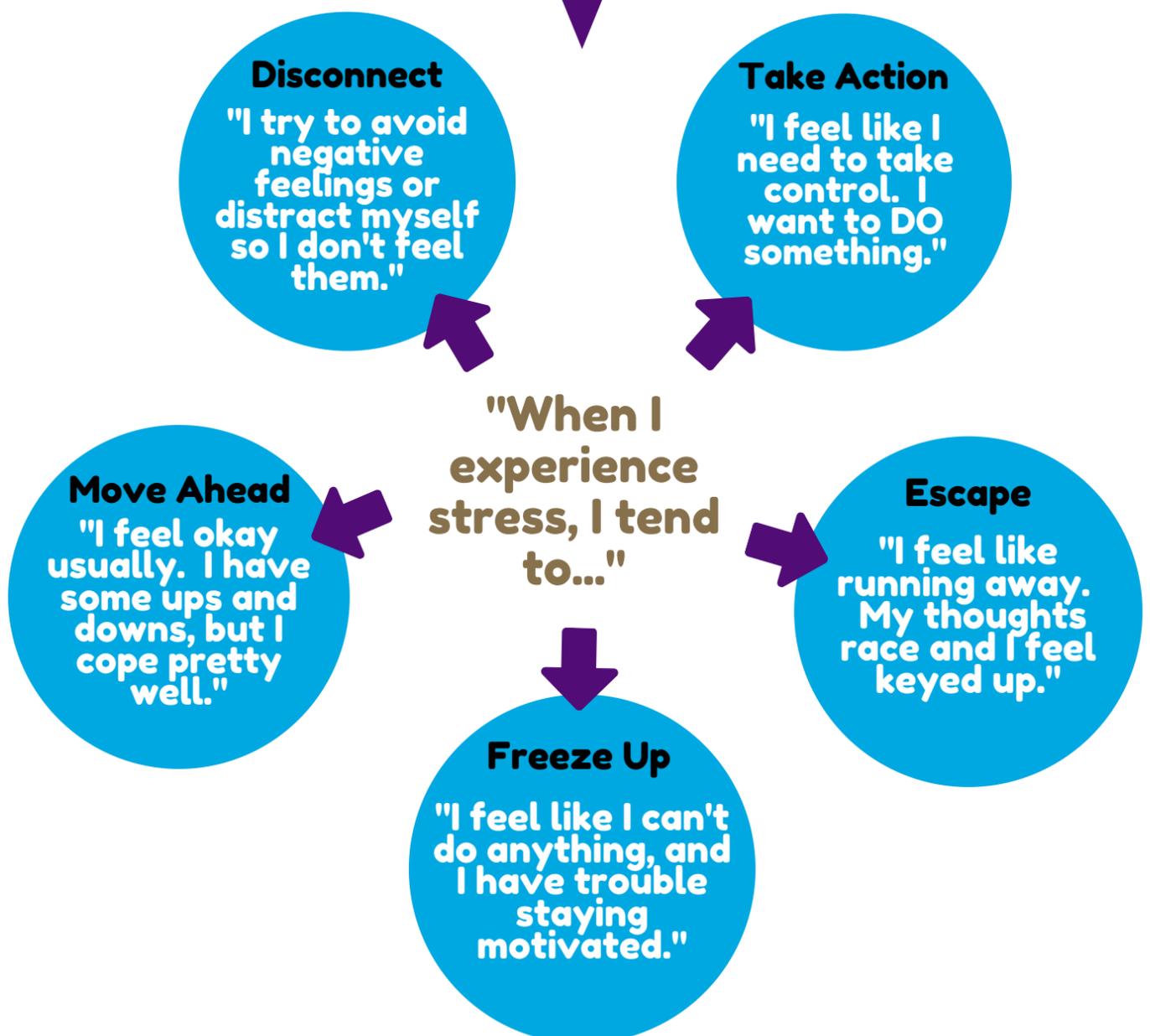
Tips and strategies for getting through the end of the semester

The last few weeks of the semester are always some of the toughest, but Fall 2020 has been especially challenging.

Your stress level might be higher than usual.
Your usual coping strategies might feel worn out.
You might feel worn out too.

But no matter what, we truly are in this together, and as we work toward the finish line, here are some tips and strategies to help you boost your mental well-being and build resilience.

Step 1: Know your stress response



Knowing your stress response can help you pick a coping strategy:



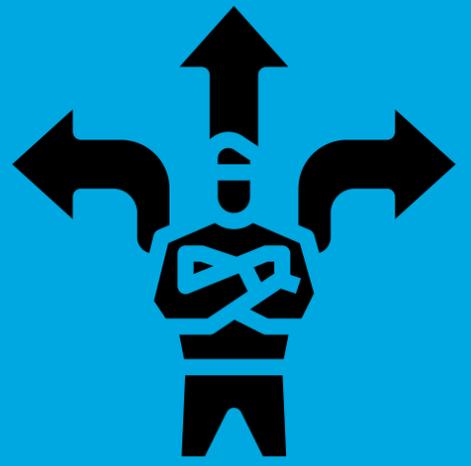
If you tend to...



- *Take Action*: Aim for balance. Control what you can, set goals, but take breaks.
- *Escape*: Decrease sensory info. Set boundaries for media consumption. Use relaxation strategies.
- *Freeze Up*: Increase sensory info. Connect with others. Establish a flexible daily routine.
- *Disconnect*: Connect with bad feelings in small doses. Allow yourself space to feel, but move to something lighter if overwhelmed.
- *Move Ahead*: Reflect on which coping strategies are working, so they'll be ready for you to use later.

Step 2: Make a Plan for Coping

BUT FIRST! Before you start, know that your stress response can change, and different coping skills may be needed at different times. The goal is to have a flexible plan, not a perfect one.



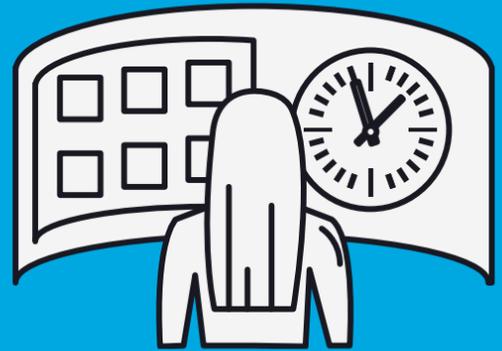
Strategy 1: Validate the Experience



- Avoiding emotions doesn't make them go away, and it often makes them worse.
- Sometimes the first step to tackle stress and worry is to acknowledge the feelings and accept that the current situation is really difficult.
- Practice self-compassion and allow yourself some time to feel bad. Work on finding coping skills that help, but create reasonable expectations for yourself and your emotions.

Strategy 2: Control What You Can

- There are a LOT of life circumstances over which we have no control, especially right now, and it's easy to feel overwhelmed.
- Focus in on the things that you can control, use your autonomy, and be mindful of the small choices you make everyday.
- You may not be able to control when the pandemic will end, but you can work toward smaller checkpoints and make choices that keep everyone healthy.
- You can't control assignment due dates, but you can create a plan to meet your deadlines.



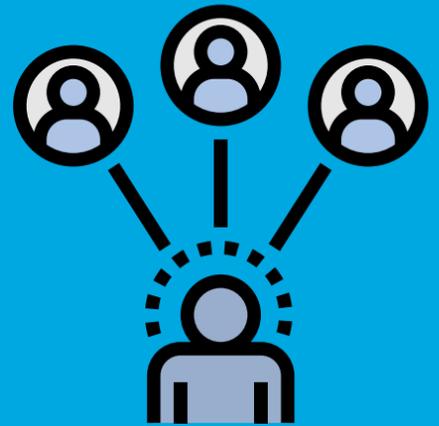
Strategy 3: Build in Some Structure



- Your typical routine has probably been thrown off this semester, and even little bits of structure can help you feel more grounded.
- Try to maintain some consistency in your daily routine, even if it's just eating breakfast at the same time, or writing a to-do list before bed.
- Schedule in small breaks so you have some built-in relaxation time.
- Use scheduling apps or planners to unburden your brain and give your memory a break.

Strategy 4: Connect with Others

- Isolation and social distancing create a higher risk of loneliness, frustration, and fatigue.
- Set aside time to communicate with friends, family, classmates, or professors in whatever way you feel comfortable.
- Attend campus events, either virtually or socially-distanced.
- Attend spiritual or religious activities, if that's your thing. Lots of these communities are holding virtual gatherings for religious services, yoga, and meditation.



Strategy 5: Limit Media Consumption

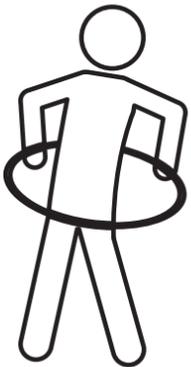


- Interaction with email, social media, and the news can sometimes make us feel more connected, but the constant flow of information can wear us down.
- As strange as it might be, consider turning off email and social media notifications for awhile. If you like to scan the headlines, maybe pick a time each day to do so.
- Look into apps like Offtime and Moment that can turn off notifications and text messages for a few hours at a time.

Remember, these strategies are just tools for your toolbox. I don't want you to feel overwhelmed by the list. Hang with me, we've only got a few more... :)

Strategy 6: Take Mini-Breaks

- In the academic world, we sometimes live from break to break, assuming that we will rest and recuperate the next time we have a long weekend or a holiday.
- This sort of pattern can lead to burnout and exhaustion pretty quick, especially in a semester like this one where formal breaks are few and far between.
- One way to avoid burnout is to take regular mini-breaks, even if it's only for 30 minutes twice a week. Use this time to engage in something different from your normal routine that will help your brain take a break.
- Journaling and meditation are more traditional options, but logic puzzles, creative projects, even video games can work!



Strategy 7: Physical Wellness

- Mental health is tied to physical health, and in times of extra stress, we often let good physical habits (like eating well, sleeping, and exercising) fall by the wayside.
- Even if you aren't able to get 8 hours of sleep or exercise for a full 30 minutes every day, this is one of those times when every extra little bit counts. Getting an extra 30 minutes of sleep, taking a quick walk, or doing a couple of yoga poses can all help!

Are you sensing a pattern yet? :) Coping is really about the little things. Grand gestures are great, but every little bit helps.

Strategy 8: Relaxation

- Take a few deep breaths. Inhale for 4 seconds. Exhale for 8. It sounds silly, but deep breathing automatically activates the body's relaxation response. Use the breathing time to focus on the present moment and give your thoughts a break.
- Practice mindfulness. We spend a lot of time thinking about the future and reminiscing about the past. We don't spend a lot of time in the here and now. The present moment is where we have the most control, and focusing on this moment can increase groundedness. See the app list below for guided meditations and mindfulness training.
- Consider journaling, coloring books, essential oil diffusers, fidget toys, reading, spending time with animals (consider fostering for Field of Dreams or working with the Humane Society), etc. Find the relaxing activity that works for you.



Strategy 9: Ask for Help

- If you're facing unique challenges, struggling to cope with the challenges of this semester on your own, or not sure where to start, don't be afraid to ask for help.
- For academic concerns, reach out to your academic advisor, a professor (current or former, we're here to help), or the CAE. Even if your primary concerns are related to mental health or the impact of stress on your work, keep us in the loop.
- For mental health concerns, consider making an appointment with **University Counseling Services**:
 - Website: <https://ucs.truman.edu/>
 - Business Hours Number: (660) 785-4014
 - After Hours Crisis Line: (660) 665-5621 (Ask for Truman On-Call Therapist)
- **Other options for support**:
 - **Center for Academic Excellence (CAE)**
 - Website: <https://excellence.truman.edu/>
 - Phone: (660) 785-7403
 - **Center for Diversity and Inclusion**
 - Website: <https://diversity.truman.edu/>
 - Email: diversity@truman.edu
 - (660) 785-4142
 - **National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK**
 - **Crisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741-741**



EXTRA STUFF

For more information on the strategies presented above, check out [Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic as a College Student](#) or [Coping with the Stress of a Pandemic: A Mental Health Guide](#).

Apps for Relaxation

Headspace
Calm
Stop, Breathe, Think
Smiling Mind
10% Happier (Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics)
MindBody



Apps for Better Sleep

Sleep Cycle
Pzizz
Slumber

Apps for Organization

myHomework Student Planner
Offtime
Trello

This message brought to you by Dr. Katie Judd, Department of Psychology, Truman State University (kjudd@truman.edu).